

## INSIGHT INTO THE MOST SIGNIFICANT CLUES OF IELTS

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**Abstract:** This paper deals with the IELTS test and its most significant aspects. IELTS stands for the International English Language Testing System and it is aimed at the speakers of English as a second language as proof of their ability to use English. IELTS is owned by the British Council, Cambridge English Language Assessment and IDP Education Australia. This is the test that sets the standard, assessing the proficiency and quality in English among students in four language skills – Listening, Reading, Writing and Speaking. The paper also puts in focus the main differences between these four skills, displaying them first through receptive and productive skills, then presenting more details about each skill separately. Listening and Speaking have the same form for both tests, whilst the Reading and Writing components are completely different. The Listening, Reading and Writing elements are completed on the same day with no breaks between them. On the other hand, Speaking can be completed up to a week before or after the other tests. Since the test provides the information about the applicant's reading and listening competencies, understanding abilities and speaking skills, all the tasks and texts are attainable to all IELTS candidates, irrespective of their background – native or non-native speakers. However, the test has no separate Grammar part.

The paper also elaborates two types of IELTS test - candidates can choose Academic IELTS and General Training IELTS test, which depends on the requirements of the institution or organization. The Academic IELTS is a requirement for university or college admission. On the other hand, the General Training IELTS is for career, training program and immigration purposes. Furthermore, assessment and band score emerge as inevitable issues when it comes to this test, considering the fact that many people are confused about the score band in IELTS. For this reason, the paper gives a more detailed overview of this criteria. The IELTS test is not a pass/fail test; the bands are on a scale from 1 to 9 as the highest score. Test candidates are provided with an overall band score and individual scores for each test component - Listening, Reading, Writing and Speaking. We concluded that English has a leading role among other languages, which implies that it is necessary to be fluent in this language and take a widely recognized exam as the proof of knowledge and fluency if you tend to work, live or study abroad. Although being considered as a hard test, from experts' claims it arises that candidates need to have a serious approach to the preparation of the test and must practice a lot. Language skills are key to career progress and they are beneficial in addition to all other requirements.

**Keywords:** IELTS, test, skills, English.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

As others have highlighted there is no official definition of "global" language, but one definition can be that it is a language that is learned and spoken at the international level. Not only is it characterized by the number of its native and second language speakers, but also by its use in international organizations and in diplomatic relations. For non-native English speakers, English is very important because it is widely spoken all around the world. Knowing English provides people with their prospective career, allows people to be educated in English-speaking countries, most of the higher impact factor journals are written and published in English. In other words, proficiency in English is no longer considered as something special, it is a requirement, particularly for those whose goal is to study or work abroad. The first step is to prepare for IELTS exam and take it. IELTS certificate opens the door to academic and professional opportunities in various institutions and organizations on global level where English is used. It is internationally recognized and accepted by more than 9,000 organizations and 140 countries worldwide.

### 2. PRODUCTIVE AND RECEPTIVE LANGUAGE SKILLS AS PART OF IELTS TEST

Listening, Reading, Speaking and Writing are language skills and candidates' knowledge of English is assessed through IELTS and these skills with different tasks. Listening and Reading are receptive skills, which means

that the reader or listener receives the information, but does not produce it; however, speaking and writing are productive skills (J. Harmer, 2004). All of these skills are important for many reasons. “Reading texts provide opportunities to study language: vocabulary, grammar, punctuation, the way we construct sentences, paragraphs and texts”, (J. Harmer, 2004). Apart from this, if reading introduces interesting topics, it stimulates discussion, helps students improve their imagination and become more creative. Students need to be able to scan and skim the text. Skimming means that students are just searching for a general idea of what the text is about and for some tasks it is enough to have the general idea about the text, with no details. Scanning refers to particular pieces of information they are searching for and students need much more concentration for tasks that include scanning. The academic reading consists of three long reading passages with 40 questions in total and each passage has approximately 12-14 questions. These texts are taken from books and academic journals at the university or college level. Candidates have one hour to read and answer the questions of these three passages in the academic module and to transfer their answers to the sample sheet (V. Jakeman and C. Mcdowell, 2008).

The General Training Reading module has three sections and also lasts for one hour. Section 1 has two or three texts that are smaller and easier than the Academic reading passages. Those texts are usually aimed at testing the candidates' ability to communicate in an English speaking environment. Section 2 has one or two texts related to work or training topics. Section 3 has one long passage, much like the Academic module. There are 40 questions in total in General Training reading module.

Listening helps students hear different accents of English and sometimes different dialects. Students should become familiar with pronunciation, intonation, rhythm, stress, not only with grammar and vocabulary. The Listening section in IELTS contains four parts and a total of 40 questions, during which candidates have to listen to four conversations and monologues. For each part of the test there will be time to look through the questions and time to check the answers. Candidates are allowed to listen to each section only once, which makes this section difficult. Candidates may encounter matching, multiple choice or flow-chart completion tasks in the Listening section. It is possible to make special arrangements for test takers with disabilities, for example, in Braille - the center should be contacted three months in advance to discuss the requirements (<https://takeielts.britishcouncil.org/choose-ielts/what-ielts>).

Writing skills are an important part of communication. Good writing skills allow students to transfer their message with clarity to a far larger audience. They also need to know how to write compositions using different writing techniques, such as writing reports, articles, reviews or proposals and so on. Good writers always plan what they are going to write about and they must be aware of three issues: a) the purpose of their writing, this refers to the type of the text they wish to produce, the language they use and the information which becomes part of their writing task; b) the audience they are writing for, which means that they have to pay attention to paragraphing, choice of language (formal or informal); c) content structure, that is, how to arrange the facts, ideas, or arguments that they include (J. Harmer, 2004). The Writing section in IELTS allows the candidate 60 minutes to write two compositions. In the Academic IELTS, the first task is about summarizing the information of a graphic, diagram or table in no more than 20 minutes of minimum 150 words. The second part is about writing an essay in 40 minutes of minimum 250 words. In the General IELTS the first part refers to writing a letter explaining a situation or requesting information. Here students need to recognize the difference between formal and informal writing. The second part is about writing an essay. Essay writing is similar to the Academic writing task 2 and carries more weights than the letter writing task. It is advisable to spend 20 minutes on letter writing task and remaining 40 minutes on essay writing task in General Training Writing.

According to Harmer, three reasons for learning and improving speaking skill are:

- Rehearsal – Students can rehearse discussion outside the classroom as well as real-life situations.
- Feedback – This helps both teachers and students. Speaking activities can give students confidence and satisfaction. On the other hand, teachers can have a better insight into students' difficulties while they are interpreting the language.
- Engagement – Students become more motivated through good speaking activities (J. Harmer, 1998).

The Speaking section in IELTS has three parts. In the first part, candidates speak about themselves and topics they are related to and it lasts 4-5 minutes. After that, the second part of speaking includes answers to some questions about a particular subject that the candidate is asked about. The candidate has one minute to prepare the answer and two minutes for talking about the given topic. Finally, the third section comprises a general discussion about the topic of part two and it is more abstract and analytical. This part lasts for 4-5 minutes (V. Jakeman and C. Mcdowell, 2008).

Although being productive skills, there is an obvious difference between Writing and Speaking skills. In Speaking there is almost no time between reception and production, when something is said once, it can only be

modified – it cannot be unsaid. However, in Writing the writer can first make a good plan and modify the things that will appear as finished product (J. Harmer, 2004).

### 3. TWO FORMATS OF IELTS – GENERAL TRAINING IELTS AND ACADEMIC IELTS

Whether you are applying for study, work or a visa, the IELTS examination is the same in terms of content, examiners, format, level of difficulty and scoring. Those who are interested in studying abroad should bear in mind that many universities worldwide and all universities and colleges in the UK recognize IELTS test results. Future international student needs to demonstrate that they are qualified and can successfully complete a degree program taught in English. Therefore, they need higher IELTS scores to enroll in advanced degree programs such as Masters or PhDs are. “There are two types of IELTS test: the Academic Module - taken for entry to undergraduate or postgraduate studies for professional reasons - and the General Training Module - taken for entry to vocational or training programs not at degree level, for admission to secondary schools and for immigration purposes”, (L. Hashemi and B. Thomas, 2011). The Listening and Speaking sections are the same in both exams, but the Writing and Reading sections differ as the texts for reading and the essays for writing in the General IELTS are more related to daily life subjects, while the ones in the Academic IELTS are about more analytical topics. So, making the decision on what test is right for the test taker is extremely important. It is advisable to talk with the Education Agent or School in order to get the best advice on what candidates are trying to achieve by doing IELTS. The IELTS exam is also accepted by immigration authorities and continues to play an important role in using language assessment as a mean to control migration numbers. For this purpose, candidates must take the General Training IELTS. There is also a new way of testing English proficiency for non-native speakers. The IELTS Life Skills is a new UK government-approved Secure English Language Test (SELT) to support UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI) application. At the end of the exam, the candidate will receive a pass/fail result rather than band scores.

#### 3.1. ASSESSMENT IN IELTS TEST

IELTS is the exam that does not have an “approve” or “fail” format. The results of the exam will show the candidate’s proficiency level in English. Candidates receive scores on a Band Scale from 1 to 9 for each skill tested and all of them are of equal importance. Then they are averaged and rounded to create an overall Band Score. For instance, candidates need to achieve 30 marks for a Band Score of 7 on Reading and Listening. Results can be shown in a full band (ex. 6.0) or in half band (ex. 6.5). According to the European Common Reference Framework for Languages, the bands from 1 to 3.5 correspond to the A1 and A2 levels which is basic knowledge of the language, the bands between 4 and 5 are equivalent to the B1 level that is intermediate, the bands between 5.5 and 6.5 are alike the B2 level with is intermediate advanced, the bands between 7.0 and 8.5 correspond to the C1 level which is advanced and finally the band 9 is a C2 level which is master in the language (L. Hashemi and B. Thomas, 2011). A high score in IELTS examination can allow students to gain more points in the points test and grant their more access to different work visas.

- In the **UK**, applicants must score at least 6.5 on each of the four components of the test (Reading, Speaking, Listening and Writing).
- For working in **Australia**, a test score of 5 is considered to be ‘vocational English’ level. A band score of 6 means that the applicant is a ‘competent English’ speaker. Most businesses require overseas employees working in Australia to prove their English level with an IELTS Score.
- In **New Zealand**, work permit applicants must gain an overall band score of 4 or higher in the IELTS General or Academic module. They may also provide additional evidence of their English language abilities, such as information about countries they have lived in, their current country of residence or their family’s knowledge of English.
- In **Canada**, applicants should check directly with the organization they want to apply to for the IELTS score requirements. Employers and educational institutions generally set their own language requirements <https://www.ielts.org/>

For all these countries, candidates should be familiar with the fact that minimum score requirements vary depending on the chosen occupation or education. For some professions, applicants must achieve a minimum of 6 in each of the testing modules, whereas for teachers, for example, a minimum score of 7 is required. So, before a test taker starts the IELTS preparation, they must be informed by the institution what band score they must reach. The IELTS results show a score for each section (skill) and a general score for the whole exam (all four skills). There are four criteria to decide on the score: how good questions were solved, the coherence and cohesion of the answers, how wide is the vocabulary of the candidate and how the grammar level is. Each of these criteria has a similar weight in the final score the test taker gets for each section. Having taken the IELTS

exam, the test taker will receive a copy of the results 13 days after they have done the written exam. The results are valid for no longer than two years. The Academic IELTS can be taken in 48 dates each year and the General IELTS in 24 dates. These are fixed dates that take place four times per month. It is possible to register to the exam by going to the test center or online, but it will depend on the rules of each center. The IELTS test can be taken in more than 900 centers worldwide. <https://www.ielts.org/>

#### 4. CONCLUSION

We concluded that one of the most important international languages is English, which is considered as a requirement for studying, working or even living abroad. The language which has a supremacy consists of three major elements: 1) the number of countries in which English is spoken as their first language or mother-tongue, 2) the number of countries in which English was adopted as the official language, and 3) the number of countries whose educational system requires teaching English as a foreign language. English is growing, it is a strong, well-developed language with millions of speakers and it seems that it has a bright future. As a result, access to English means access to education, career progress and better job opportunities. **Academic Module** is suitable for those who are going to apply for further studies and professional registration. Academic module mainly focuses on the candidates' ability to continue their education at an English speaking university or a professional place. **General Training** is appropriate for those who are going to English-speaking countries to complete work experience and training programs or for immigration purposes. General Training IELTS format mainly focuses on general communication skills of the candidates they will need in the workplace and society in an English speaking country. The required Band Score depends on the organization or institution and their rules for entry. We also concluded that candidates need to be familiar with all four skills separately – Listening, Reading, Writing and Speaking. Not only is it recommended that candidates practice each skill separately, but also each task individually. Apart from previously gained knowledge as a good base, the good preparation and a lot of practice emerge as an inevitable component to the goal – successfully completed IELTS test.

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